Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain. *Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin, eds ..* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. xvi + 413pp. , photographs, illustrations, notes, references, index.

Jointly reviewed with: **The Anthropology of Media: A Reader.** Kelly Askew and Richard R. Wilk, eds

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Anthropologists have often approached media as something haphazardly stumbled on while conducting fieldwork or as a basis of anecdotal comparison in discussions of more substantial issues. The topic is consistently approached uncritically, and the presence of various forms of media in different cultural settings is either considered exotic or disregarded as commonplace. In the edited volumes *The Anthropology of Media* and *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain,* a number of pivotal essays complicate the conceptualization and place of media in the anthropological project. Whereas the primary aim of *The Anthropology of Media* is to clarify an interdisciplinary historical approach to the analysis of media and to introduce a possible new subfield for anthropologists, *Media Worlds* assumes this background and boldly demonstrates that a methodological direction for the ethnographic analysis of media is already mapped out and being followed. Both volumes are welcome at a time when the importance and recognition of media in anthropology is growing. Although I will touch on the considerable content of both of these volumes (a combined 42 essays), my primary emphasis in this review is on the claims made by the editors and on the role of the volumes as foundational texts that mark a shift in anthropology toward a more active engagement of media.

The editors of both volumes acknowledge past attempts to review anthropological approaches to media, as we11 as works from other disciplines that laid a foundation for the exploration of media and society. Common ancestors claimed include Raymond Williams, Marshall McLuhan, Hortense Powdermaker, Margaret Mead, and Stuart Hall. Both volumes also include thought-provoking and well-constructed introductory essays that trace the history of the interdisciplinary underpinning of media analysis within anthropology and provide a possible methodological vision for a future course of action. This is especially true in *Media Worlds,* where the editors have not concerned themselves as much with asserting the validity of studying media in anthropology as they have theorized the possibility of producing "new kinds of knowledge" (p. 23) through an ethnographic examination of media and their related processes in different cultural settings.

A number of other similarities exist between the two volumes. First, the editors see a need to expand the notion of what is considered media beyond the "visualist bias" (Askew and Wilk, p. 3) to include radio and other mediums they believe are often overlooked or subsumed under visual anthropology. Second, the editors of both volumes see the late 1980s as a post "crisis of representation" point of departure for a contemporary analysis of media within anthropology. Although media were of critical interest to a few anthropologists prior to this time, the editors claim that the insight gained through the postmodern critique of anthropology has enabled a more robust understanding of media and their processes. Finally, there is primary emphasis in both volumes on the need to take into account the social

contexts in which media occur.

The emphasis placed on social context by the editors of both volumes is meant to provide a logical space for the inclusion of ethnographic methodology in the analysis of media. This insistence on the importance of social context also moves beyond previous discussions within anthropology that failed to deal with the complex social milieu in which different forms of media are located. As Askew points out,

Recent decades have witnessed an explosion of fascinating critical approaches to the study of culture and media that interrogate in creative ways the all too common tendency to divorce media technologies and media texts from their social contexts. We seek to continue this trend by foregrounding the people taking pictures, listening to the radio, working behind and posing before the video camera, and examine how they manipulate these technologies to their own cultural, economic and ideological ends [p. 1].

Referring to ethnographic approaches that analyze the local contexts in which media occur, Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin assert that "such strategies help us see not only how media are embedded in people's quotidian lives but also how consumers and producers are themselves imbricated in discursive universes, political situations, economic circumstances, national settings, historical moments, and transnational flows, to name only a few relevant contexts" (p. 2). These statements will undoubtedly anchor many discussions of media in anthropology in the coming years.

Askew and Wilk position the majority of essays in *The Anthropology of Media* as a collection, intended for reference, of seminal works in the development of an anthropology of media. In her introduction, Askew asserts that the purpose of the volume is to "tease out the commonalities and differences *in* media experience and the *interpretation* of media experience" (p. 2). In this sense, she is stressing a need to appreciate the unique way in which anthropology sees media "as simply one aspect of contemporary social life" (p. 10). As Askew herself suggests, the volume would be most pedagogically useful in conjunction with current full-length ethnographies of media. To this end, Askew and Wilk divide the volume into five sections, with the overall purpose of providing the reader with a background in the historical, ethical, and theoretical issues confronting the contemplation of media in anthropology. Part 1, ··seeing/Hearing is Believing: Technology and Truth," includes fundamental early essays that expressed hope in the possibilities offered to social science by supposedly objective visual instruments and early critical thinking regarding media and society. The essays assembled in parts 2 and 3, "Representing Others" and "Representing Selves," question both the role of media in "promoting distortions and misrepresentations of cultures" (p. 73) and the concomitant queries that arise when "Others" produce media themselves. In part 4, "Active Audiences," authors engage the theoretical shift toward recognition of the agency of the audience. This section includes the only essay in the volume that extends the focus of media analysis beyond the visual form (Tacchi). The last section, entitled "Power, Colonialism, Nationalism," represents a point of departure, as the editors guide the reader toward a critical assessment of how media operate in different social contexts. Many of the foundational essays for the new subfield being proposed by Askew have been part of the critical rethinking of visual anthropology in recent years, so although the collection of these essays in one volume is important and welcomed, it does not necessarily support Askew's declaration of the creation of a new legitimate subfield within anthropology.

The essays in *Media Worlds* provide instrumental methodological utility to current anthropology. There is evidence in the volume of a movement beyond the commonsense analysis of the production, content, and reception of media, to the engagement of the activist and applied notions that any visual or media anthropologist should have as his or her primary focus. What is also apparent in *Media Worlds* is the editors' understanding that the researcher will be more prepared to contemplate the place of media within culture with a firsthand understanding of the practices of production. Ginsburg et al. argue that, "refiguring the ethnography of media necessitates a further expansion by taking into consideration the physical and sensory properties of the technologies themselves and examining the materiality of communication across cultures" (p. 19). They focus on the localities in which ethnographies of media are taking place, while at the same time demonstrating the need to

consider the larger transnational, socioeconomic, and political empowennent efforts in which they are situated. The volume is arranged in sections along a "sociopolitical continuum" (p. 7), from anthropological approaches to media that look at larger government and commercial productions to those that focus on the smaller, but no less significant, "self-conscious practices" (p. 7) of individuals in various struggles for empowennent. The reader gains a more active and dense sensibility of media's place among indigenous production, state politics, various technological practices, and the myriad sites of its production. There is no doubt that *Media Worlds* will be looked on in the future as the canonical text for this established and expanding field of study in anthropology.

It is impossible to discuss every important essay in these volumes, and some are shared between the two, but several stand out and deserve mention because they demonstrate important steps in the analysis of media in anthropology. In Askew and Wilk's volume, Lila Abu-Lughod fluidly links ethnographic detail with the impact of media in a subaltern cultural setting while contextualizing Egyptian television and the state. By doing so, she epitomizes the analysis of media and their social context that the editors of both volumes are advocating. Wilk asserts an important methodological focus in his discussion of the way people talk about television in Belize. He demonstrates that "television has become a social, cultural and political issue" (p. 296). In Ginsburg et al., Jeff Himpele addresses the complexity of actually conducting a media ethnography in his discussion of complicity and "the parallax effect" of his own role in Bolivian media. And, finally, Debra Spitulnik's attempt to widen reception studies through her analysis of Zambian radio culture and its links to everyday life demonstrates an important expansion into nonvisual fonns of media.

Although the movement toward a recognition of media as a legitimate subject within anthropology anticipated by the editors and authors in both volumes fennents interesting approaches and topics, it also signals a semantic and possible theoretical confusion that inevitably occurs when a growing area of study attempts to fonnulate methods and accompanying analytic language. When focusing on media and their social context, are we conducting media anthropology under the rubric of an anthropology of media? Or do we practice media ethnography guided by a theoretical approach toward an ethnography of media? And should we embed the study of any media in a sound theory of communication? Undoubtedly, these questions will be considered as more researchers continue to consider the role of media in anthropology. Both *The Anthropology of Media* and *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* indicate important steps in the anthropological engagement of media, and for those looking to gamer a rich understanding of this movement, the two volumes should be required reading.